



NEWS RELEASE



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Hanford National Monument Temporary Closures

As part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's on-going efforts to rehabilitate Hanford Reach National Monument, it will be necessary to temporarily close the Wahluke area of the Monument to all access. This will include the White Bluffs boat launch and the Wahluke Ponds. The closure will begin on or about November 13, 2009, and could last up to two weeks. This temporary closure will allow the Service to aerially apply herbicide to control cheatgrass and other non-native annual plants prior to native seed planting and additional rehabilitation measures.

The temporary closure and temporary access restrictions are needed to continue restoration of native shrubs and grasses on over 78,000 acres that burned in wildfires during the summers of 2007 and 2008. Restoration work has been ongoing since November 2007, with over 1.55 million native upland and riparian shrubs planted and over 50,000 acres treated for invasive weeds to date. This fall, work following the chemical application will focus on aerial and ground seeding, including native grass, shrub, and wildflower species. Standing dead Russian olive trees will be removed and native upland shrubs and riparian plants will be planted in their place. The seed mixes, shrubs, and riparian plants will help to stabilize soils and prevent erosion, repair damage to native ecosystems, and compete with a variety of non-native, invasive plant species (such as cheatgrass).

Additional, more localized, temporary closures will occur later this winter as other rehabilitation activities progress. It is important that visitors heed closure signs and closed gates for their own safety and for the safety of the crews conducting the restoration operations. Visitors may call the Service's Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex headquarters at (509) 546-8300 for up-to-date information on closures during this rehabilitation effort, including potential weekend closures.

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The FWS manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 542 national wildlife refuges—including two national monuments—thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid Program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.